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## AUSTRIA: CLOVER AND ALFALFA SEED SITUATION 1956-57

### SUMMARY

Unless excessive precipitation from now on until harvesting time reduces present good prospects, Austrian production of clover seeds should be somewhat larger this year than in 1955. Annual seed requirements are not believed to vary materially from year to year. Thus, imports of clover seeds during the crop year 1956-57 should not quite come up to the comparatively high level of 1955-56, approximately 2,250 thousand pounds.

Reportedly the clover seed crop in northern Italy has been virtually destroyed by adverse weather and seed grown in southern Italy is not hardy enough to produce good results in Austria. Therefore, presumably, more clover seed will be imported from northern France in 1956-57.

### PRODUCTION

In Austria, no official data are compiled on the production of red clover, alfalfa, or any other clovers. Unfortunately trade contacts also are unable to furnish reliable estimates, since only part of the domestic seed crop reaches commercial channels; a large percentage of the clover seed remains with the producers for use on their own farms.

However, there is an indirect approach to the problem which has been resorted to in estimating seed production. The method is to compute seed consumption on the basis of formulas worked out by the Austrian Federal Institute for Plant Production, and to deduct from the result the quantities of seed imported during the same crop year. The balance is assumed to represent a good approximation to the quantity of seed produced within the country. Allowance for changes in stocks or exports need not be made, since farm and commercial stocks are practically depleted by the end of a given crop year, and exports, if any, are negligible.

The production figures thus obtained cannot be more than approximations, but it is believed that they give a good indication of the relative importance of domestic clover seed production in comparison with imports.

Seeding Practices. On the large estates, which represent a small percentage of the number of farms in Austria, but which control a large percentage of the total farm land, clover seeds are sown with a grain drill, while as a rule on the small farms they are broadcast. On medium-sized farms both methods are used.

Growing Conditions. Excessive rainfall during the growing seasons of 1954 and, to an even larger degree, 1955, produced exceptionally heavy yields of clover hay, but affected clover seed growing adversely. Yields were low. However, insect damage and diseases were entirely within normal margins.

Red Clover. The area planted to red clover is approximately 250 thousand acres and varies little from one year to another. On an average, clover fields are reseeded every three years. We may assume, therefore, that roughly one third of the total acreage, i.e., about 80 thousand acres, is seeded to red clover each year.

Seed requirements per acre are estimated at 18 pounds. Thus, total annual consumption of red clover seed, based on an acreage of 80 thousand acres, would appear to be about 1,450 thousand pounds. However, many farmers are known to have used less than 18 pounds of seed per acre with satisfactory results. Making some allowance for this fact, total annual consumption of red clover seed in Austria may be estimated at roughly 1,300 thousand pounds.

Home production of red clover seed is concentrated in the province of Upper Austria, the northern part of Lower Austria, and there is some production in Burgenland. The climate in these sections has enough precipitation for red clover to thrive, but at the same time there is a sufficiently warm and dry period in late summer to permit good development of the seed crop, and good conditions for harvesting.

Alfalfa. Austrian alfalfa fields are reseeded at about 5-year intervals. The total acreage under alfalfa is approximately 170 thousand acres; and, using the same method as was used for red clover, it is estimated that for an average seed requirement of 27 pounds per acre, the annual consumption figure would be approximately 925 thousand pounds.

To an even greater extent than in the case of red clover, alfalfa seed production is concentrated in the eastern sections where the summer is more warm and dry than in other parts of Austria. Thus we find that alfalfa seed is produced primarily in eastern Lower Austria, especially in the Marchfeld area, in the eastern parts of the Vienna Basin, and in Burgenland.

In 1954-55, imports of alfalfa seed were reported at 472 thousand pounds; in 1955-56, according to preliminary foreign trade data, imports were about 595 thousand pounds. It follows that domestic production of alfalfa seed in these two years must have been approximately 454 and 331 thousand pounds, respectively, to meet estimated total annual seed requirements of 925 thousand pounds.



Other Clovers. Domestic production of clover seeds other than red clover and alfalfa were estimated by the Federal Institute for Plant Production at 44 thousand pounds for 1954-55, and at only 22 thousand pounds for 1955-56. The bulk of the estimated annual requirements of 575 thousand pounds was imported from abroad, including white clover, alsike, birdsfoot trefoil and others.

### FOREIGN TRADE

Exports. Austria is a net importer of clover seeds. Exports, if any, are negligible. There is no indication that this situation will change in the near future.

Imports. Seeds of red clover, alfalfa, and other clovers, listed in Austrian foreign trade statistics under the code number 88, and customs tariff position number 42, are among those agricultural commodities, imports of which from the OEEC area and the dollar area have not yet been liberalized.

Farm groups in Austria are of the opinion that at present liberalization of agricultural commodities has already reached a limit that cannot be exceeded without harmful effects upon Austrian producer interests. There has even been some talk of deliberalization of certain, as yet unspecified, items. Under these circumstances it is most unlikely that trade in clover seeds will be freed from governmental controls in the foreseeable future. In other words, the government probably will continue to exercise its power of rejecting applications for import licenses if and when importation of clover seed is contemplated from sources which are considered incompatible with the objectives of Austrian foreign trade policy and national economy.

It is doubtful whether imports of clover seed will be made from the United States in any volume. United States red clover has never been able to gain a foothold in Austria because past experience has shown it to be highly susceptible to certain plant diseases common in Europe, particularly to mildew. As regards alfalfa seed, tests made with United States grown hybrid alfalfas and the variety "Ranger" have shown these strains to be less productive under Austrian conditions of soil and climate than varieties grown in northern France and Italy.

An added difficulty in importing clover seeds from the United States is the Austrian National Bank's well-known reluctance to release free dollars for imports of commodities which can be procured at reasonable prices and in satisfactory quality, under EPU or Eastern clearing.

Trade Agreements. Italy and France are the major suppliers of clover seeds, primarily because varieties grown in the northern sections of these countries have produced satisfactory results under Austrian conditions of soil and climate. Austrian trade agreements with the principal supplier countries, Italy and France, do not specifically provide for imports of clover seeds, but for seeds in general. This will include vegetable and forestry seeds, as well as flower seeds. Therefore, the amounts to be used for purchases of seeds, as set down in current trade agreements with these countries, give no indication as to the volume of annual imports of clover seeds to be expected from these areas.

### STOCKS

Farm Stocks. In Austria, harvesting of clover for seed falls within the months of August and September. Prior to that time, i.e., at the beginning of the crop year, farm stocks of clover seed are practically non-existent.

Commercial Stocks. A fair-sized portion of Austrian seed imports is handled by farmer cooperatives. Imports are made mainly in the fall and during January and February in just the quantity determined by the wholesale cooperatives on the basis of individual requirements reported by their member associations.

In March and April, the main marketing season, cooperatively held stocks of clover seeds are usually disposed of in their entirety. If it is found that the quantities imported do not suffice, additional small imports are made to stop any such gaps. It rarely happens that the cooperatives lay in more imported clover seed than they can move into consumption in the main marketing season. Hence, for all practical purposes, commercial stocks of clover seeds may be assumed to be wholly depleted by the end of a given crop year.

### PRICES

During the main marketing season the wholesale price of imported clover seed, mostly of French origin, was about \$23.00 per 100 pounds, c.i.f. Austrian border, for red clover seed, and \$31.00 for alfalfa seed.

At the beginning of March 1956, domestic red clover seed, containing up to four percent foreign matter, was quoted on the Vienna Produce Exchange at \$17.50 - \$23.00 per 100 pounds, and alfalfa seed at \$21.00 - \$24.50.

### SPECIAL CROP PROGRAMS

There is no country-wide program for clover in operation in this country. In some sections of Austria, local chambers of agriculture have initiated action to expand alfalfa production in certain areas where livestock holdings are large enough to warrant the expenditure involved. The measures taken include subsidizing the price of alfalfa seed and fertilizers. However, these crop programs have only local significance.

In past years, production of clovers other than alfalfa has not been encouraged through price subsidization; no promotional programs for these clovers are currently being contemplated.

Austria: Supply and Distribution of Alfalfa and Clover Seeds,  
1955-56, With Comparisons

	Alfalfa	Red Clover	Other Clovers
	1,000 Pounds	1,000 Pounds	1,000 Pounds
Carryover, July 1, 1954	-	-	-
Production	454	463	44
Imports 1954-55	472	860	529
Total supply	926	1,323	573
Consumption	926	1,323	573
Exports 1954-55	-	-	-
Carryover, June 30, 1955	-	-	-
Total distribution	926	1,323	573
Carryover, July 1, 1955	-	-	-
Production 1/	331	265	22
Imports 1955-56 1/	595	1,102	551
Total supply	926	1,367	573
Consumption 1/	926	1,323	573
Exports 1955-56 1/	-	44	-
Carryover, June 30, 1956	-	-	-
Total distribution	926	1,367	573

1/ Preliminary estimates.



Austria: Imports of Alfalfa and Clover Seeds,

Crop year 1954-55, and Forecast 1955-56

Kind of Seed and Country of Origin	1954-55	Preliminary estimates 1955-56
	<u>1,000 Pounds</u>	<u>1,000 Pounds</u>
<u>Alfalfa</u>		
Western Germany	34	
Italy	253	
France	96	
Netherlands	89	
Total	472	595
<u>Red Clover</u>		
Italy	502	
Yugoslavia	7	
France	326	
Great Britain	22	
Total	857	1,102
<u>Other Clover</u>		
Western Germany	21	
Italy	340	
Yugoslavia	33	
Hungary	65	
France	49	
Canada	22	
Total	530	551

Source: 1954-55 - Austrian Central Statistical Bureau.  
1955-56 - Based on incomplete official data.